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ABSTRACT

In order to determine what programs and practices in teaching reading were being used by the elementary schools in Saskatchewan, a survey was carried out in the winter of 1973. Eighty-two percent of the questionnaires (630) were returned by the schools. The survey shows that elementary schools in Saskatchewan use a variety of plans for classroom organization and a large majority of the classrooms are self-contained. Experimentation with other forms of organization is evident in a small number of schools. The methods of instruction also vary considerably as do the instructional materials used in teaching reading. The findings of the survey are presented in both narrative and table form. (RB)

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A SURVEY OF READING PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES IN SASKATCHEWAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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A SURVEY OF READING PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES IN SASKATCHEWAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Reading instruction is the most significant aspect of the elementary school curriculum. A child's success in school is dependent upon his reading ability. The elementary schools are responsible for initiating and developing fundamental reading skills in children.

In order to determine what programs and practices in teaching reading were being used by the elementary schools in Saskatchewan the author carried out a survey in the winter of 1973. The survey was made by means of a questionnaire mailed to schools. A total of 630 questionnaires (82%) were received as completed.

The questionnaire was based on the one used by Carl Smith and others in Indiana.*

The questionnaire contained a section on general data about the school and five other sections as follows: (i) organization, (ii) materials, (iii) remedial reading programs, (iv) summer program, and (v) needs and problems. Each section was divided into two or more sub-sections. The results are presented below. It may be mentioned that some questions called for more than one response resulting in a figure of more than 100% in some Tables.

*See, "An Examination of Reading Programs in Indians Schools," Bulletin of the School of Education, Indiana University, 1969, pp. 1-92).

I. Organization of the Classroom

This survey shows that elementary schools in Saskatchewan use a variety of plans for classroom organization. A large majority of the classrooms are, however, self-contained. Table I contains a summary of responses concerning the plans used.

TABLE 1

Classroom Organizational Patterns

	Responses	% of Responses
Self-contained	477	54.3
Modified self-contained	145	16.5
Departmentalized	89	10.1
Team Teaching	38	4.3
Joplin Plan	37	4.2
Ungraded	35	4.0
Others	58	6.6

Grouping practices in the elementary schools vary considerably with three or more groups being the most common. Individualized reading instruction is also conducted in a large number of schools. The data is summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Reading Groups in Schools

	No. of Responses	% of responses
3 or more groups	389	38.8
2 groups	225	22.5
Individualized instruction	205	20.5
1 group	182	18.2

II. Materials

Schools were asked to indicate which reading series they used most often. Among the series listed Reading 360 (Ginn) was quoted most frequently. Collier-Macmillan Reading Program and Nelson's Language Development Readers were the least often mentioned. A summary of results is given in Table 3.

TABLE 3

Reading Series in Use

	No. of Responses	% of Responses
Reading 360	240	25.1
Canadian Development Series (Copp Clark)	159	16.6
Language Experience (Gage)	108	11.3
Language Pattern	98	10.3
Language Development (Nelson)	47	4.9
Collier-Macmillan	20	2.1
Others	283	29.7

Schools were also asked to indicate the types of supplementary materials available to them. Workbooks, charts and pictures, and tests were mentioned, in that order. Table 4 gives the exact data.

TABLE 4

Supplementary Materials Available

	No. of Responses	% of Responses
Workbooks	545	25.3
Charts and pictures	382	17.7
Tests	307	14.2
Flash cards	269	12.5
Filmstrips	264	12.2
Records and/or tapes	207	9.6
Films	107	5.0
Others	76	3.5

Respondents were asked to indicate the instruments used to gather information about children's strengths and weaknesses in reading. Table 5 lists their responses. It may be noticed that schools use multiple criteria.

TABLE 5

Criteria for Identifying Children's Strengths and Weaknesses

	No. of Responses	% of Responses
Informal Reading Inventories or Teacher-made Tests	493	31.9
Standardized Achievement Tests	471	30.5
Standardized Diagnostic Tests	387	25.0
Checklists	129	8.4
Others	64	4.2

III. Remedial Reading Program

Schools were asked to indicate the arrangements made for remedial instruction for children who were reading one or more years below their capacity. The summary of responses is given in Table 6 below.

TABLE 6

Arrangements for Remedial Reading Instruction

	No. of Responses	% of Responses
In their classroom	466	51.4
Outside their classroom but within the building	293	32.3
In a special clinic outside the building	43	4.8
In a summer reading program	26	2.8
No specific provision for remedial instruction	78	8.6

Respondents were also asked to indicate who was responsible for diagnosis of reading difficulties in their schools. The responses suggest that the classroom teacher assumes primary responsibility. Details are given in Table 7.

TABLE 7

Responsibility for Reading Diagnosis

	No. of Responses	% of Responses
The Classroom Teacher	585	59.0
Reading Consultant or Supervisor	196	19.1
Remedial Reading Teacher	142	14.3
No one designated	1	0.1
Others	67	6.8

Schools were asked if they had available the services of specialists in their district or unit. School psychologists, social workers, reading specialists, speech and hearing specialists, psychometrists were mentioned in that order. Table 8 below gives the exact figures.

TABLE 8

Specialists Available in the District/Unit

	No. of Responses	% of Responses
School Psychologists	516	36.9
Social Worker	248	17.8
Reading Specialists	233	16.7
Speech and Hearing Therapists	226	16.2
Psychometrists	130	9.3
None of the above	44	3.1

Respondents were asked how children were selected for remedial programs. Table 9 below indicates that classroom teacher's referral was the most common procedure. Standardized achievement tests were used in 22.6% of schools and standardized diagnostic test results were used in 19.6% of schools.

TABLE 9

Selection of Students for Remedial Reading Programs

	No. of Responses	% of Responses
Classroom Teacher Referral	527	33.1
Standardized Achievement Tests	360	22.6
Standardized Diagnostic Tests	312	19.6
Intelligence Tests	201	12.6
Parents' Request	128	8.1
Others	64	4.0

V. Summer Programs

Summer programs can be organized to help children make up heir deficiencies. However, very few schools provide such programs is Table 10 below indicates.

TABLE 10

Summer Programs

	No. of Responses	% of Responses
Summer Programs available	36	6.4
No Summer Programs available	524	93.6

Those who offered a summer program in their district were also asked how students were selected for such a program. Their responses are listed in Table 11.

TABLE 11

Student Selection for Summer Programs

	No. of Responses	% of Responses
Teacher Recommendation	29	50.0
Volunteer Registration	16	27.6
Failure in Regular School Year	3	5.2
Others	10	17.2

V. Needs and Problems

In order to assess the needs and problems in the area of elementary reading instruction, respondents were asked to rank their three greatest needs from the list of possible concerns.

The first list related to the organization of the program. In terms of rank order, the three greatest needs indicated were

(i) provision for diagnosis and correction in the classroom, (ii) provision for diagnosis and correction outside the classroom, and (iii) flexibility in the choice of text materials to meet individual differences. It may be noticed from Table 12 below that the first two needs had nearly the same number of respondents.

TABLE 12

Problems and Needs

Organization of the Reading Program

	No. of Responses	% of Responses
Provision for diagnosis and correction in the classroom	168	26.9
Provision for diagnosis and correction outside the classroom	162	26.0
Flexibility in the choice of text materials to meet individual differences	101	16.2
Move flexibility in grouping children within a class	65	10.4
Inclusion of a regular testing and evaluation program	44	7.1
Others	31	5.1
No evident need in this category	52	8.3

The second list dealt with general personnel needs related to reading. Here, the three top personnel needs of schools were: (i) remedial reading teachers, (ii) teachers with adequate knowledge of reading skills, and (iii) supervisors of reading or reading consultants. The data is shown in Table 13.

TABLE 13

Needs and Problems
General Personnel

	No. of Responses	% of Responses
Remedial reading teachers	224	36.4
Teachers with adequate knowledge and skills	189	30.7
Supervisors of reading or reading consultants	55	8.9
Reading clinician	48	7.8
Administrators more conversant with reading needs	36	5.9
No evident need in this category	41	6.7
Others	22	3.6

The focus of the third list was on teacher personnel needs. The three greatest needs expressed were: (i) more undergraduate training in teaching reading skills, (ii) training in informal diagnosis and corrective techniques in reading, and (iii) a planned series of workshops and/or institutes to increase teacher effectiveness. Complete information is provided in Table 14.

TABLE 14

Needs and Problems
Teacher Personnel Needs

	No. of Responses	% of Responses
More undergraduate training in teaching reading skills	244	36.3
Training in informal diagnosis and corrective techniques	170	25.3
Planned series of workshops and/or institutes to increase teacher effectiveness	134	19.9
Acquaintance with commercially available materials	61	9.0
Flexibility with grouping techniques	44	6.5
No evident need	20	3.0
~~Others~~		

In the fourth list respondents were asked to indicate their greatest need from the possible needs given. The need for reading teachers who have a B.Ed. degree with a minimum of 12-16 semester hours of instruction in developmental, corrective, and remedial reading was indicated by 28.4% of the respondents. The need for reading specialists with a Master's degree was expressed by 23.5% of the respondents. Teachers with two years of college education who have a minimum of 3 semester hours of instruction in teaching reading was indicated as the greatest need by 18% as shown in Table 15.

TABLE 15

Needs and Problems
Greatest Need

	No. of Responses	% of Responses
Reading teachers who have a B.Ed. degree with a minimum of 12-16 semester hours in developmental, corrective, and remedial reading	186	28.4
Reading specialists who have a Master's degree with specialization in reading	154	23.5
Teachers with two years of college education who have a minimum of 3 semester hours of instruction in the teaching of reading	118	18.0
Teachers with a B.Ed. degree who have a minimum of 6-8 semester hours of instruction in the teaching of reading	77	11.8
Others	120	18.3

Summary

The majority of Saskatchewan elementary schools have self-contained classrooms. Experimentation with other forms of organization is evident in a small number of schools. Three or more groups, two groups, and individualized approach is common in many schools.

There is a considerable variation in the use of reading materials in elementary schools. However, a majority of schools uses Reading 360 (Ginn). Numerous supplementary materials such as workbooks, charts and pictures, tests, flash cards, filmstrips, records and tapes, and films are used as a part of the reading program.

Saskatchewan elementary schools use Informed Reading Inventories or teacher-made tests, achievement tests, and diagnostic tests to identify children's strengths and weaknesses.

Remedial reading instruction is provided in the regular classrooms by a majority of schools. However, a large number of schools make arrangements for remedial work outside the classroom but within the building. In a few cases children are sent to clinics outside the school building. The classroom teacher assumes the major responsibility for reading diagnosis. Most of the schools have the services of school psychologists available. A good number of districts/units also have social workers, reading specialists, and speech and hearing therapists.

In selecting students for remedial reading programs classroom teacher's referral is used most frequently. Other techniques used include results of achievement, diagnostic, and intelligence tests.

Summer programs are rare in Saskatchewan schools. In a few cases where they are available, teacher recommendation and volunteer registration are generally used for selecting students.

Two major needs of the elementary schools are provisions for diagnosis and correction in the classroom and outside the classroom. Schools need remedial reading teachers and seem to prefer teachers with a B.Ed. degree with 12-16 semester hours in developmental, corrective, and remedial reading as a part of their teacher education.

Recommendations

The data obtained in this ~~summary~~ survey suggests that:

1. School districts or units should consider establishing summer schools for children to make up their deficiencies in reading. Schools can utilize their regular physical

facilities, and materials to provide such services. They may charge a minimum fee for such services during the summer.

2. The university reading classes should provide adequate knowledge and skills in the teaching of reading. They should also include techniques for classroom diagnosis and correction. The university might consider making two reading classes a requirement for all prospective teachers at the undergraduate level. A graduate program for reading consultants and clinicians may also be considered.
3. School districts should provide a series of workshops for teachers to increase their effectiveness.
4. School superintendents and curriculum specialists should provide for and encourage flexibility in the choice of materials to meet individual differences in reading.